

Select Miscellany

OLD CUSTOMS.

Old customs! Well, our children say
We get along without them;
But you and I, dear, in our day
Had other thoughts about them.
The dear old haunts of the past—
I cannot choose but love them,
And such to think of here and there
Has soared so far above them.

We had not, in the years gone by,
The grace that art discovers;
Our lives were common; you and I
Were very simple lovers.
And when, our daily duties o'er,
We stayed beside the rooster;
The only goose you ever wore
Were bright and blooming breeches.

Our rustic way was slow, but yet
So good there was about it;
And many a time we now regret
Old habits would have suited.
I know our children still can see
The fifth commandment's beauty—
May they obey, as we once did,
From love and not from duty.

The world to-day is far too high
In wisdom to confess it;
But well we know, you and I,
For what we have to bless them.
Though love was in the heart of each,
I trembled to accept you;
Had you required a polished speech,
I think I would have lost you.

No doubt our minds are slow to grasp
The ways we are not heeding;
But here upon our memory's page
Is very simple reading.
It says the forms we still hold fast
Were wise as well as pleasant—
The good old customs of the past
Have leavened all the present.

Honest for a Day.

She had up made her mind the night before. Thinking over the insincerity of life and people generally, Mrs. Brown had suddenly decided that for one day she would be true as gold—honest as the sunlight. She made a solemn compact with herself that for one twenty-four hours she would think, speak and act the truth. That she would do nothing insincere just because society demanded it, or her own good nature suggested it; but that for one single day she would be honest.

Now one of Mrs. Brown's strongest creeds, although unformulated, was that a wife should never disagree with her husband. No matter what her real opinion was, was so much more comfortable to agree than not to agree that, in their married life of ten years, Mr. Brown had ever held a high opinion of his wife's good sense. Imagine his feelings, therefore, when upon this memorable morning the following little scene took place. It was before breakfast, and they were dressing. Mr. Brown was standing in front of the bureau that contained the only mirror in the room, brushing his hair with a leisurely nicety that was trying to the patience of Mrs. Brown. She was not half as far advanced in her toilet as her husband, and her luxuriant hair was awaiting its turn of brush and comb and mirror. She heaved a sigh and said, "Oh, dear!"

"In a hurry, Sarah? Be through in a moment. You don't think I'm long; do you?"

Now any other morning but this Mrs. Brown would have answered sweetly: "Oh no, dear, take your time." But this morning, true to her vow of sincerity, she said frankly: "Well yes; I do. I've been waiting some time; and my hair is much more troublesome to fix than yours, you know."

If a roll of thunder had suddenly growled overhead, Mr. Brown would not have been equally thunderstruck. In sheer amazement he moved aside and gave her place. Then said:

"Got out of the wrong side of bed this morning; didn't you?"

"No," answered Mrs. Brown truthfully. "I think I got out at the same side that I always do."

"Pshaw!" whistled Mr. Brown. "You are late and cross this morning, or I shouldn't say so!"

"No," said Mrs. Brown, serenely, "I think it is you who are quick-tempered."

"Well!" gasped Mr. Brown. "I never!"

And he never had. He went out and slammed the door. Mrs. Brown sighed, but went on arranging her hair and finished her dressing. She resisted the momentary impulse she had to run after her lord and smooth down his feathers, and soon felt the sustaining glow of self-approval.

"It's hard," she thought, "but I will do it. Surely society is in a bad state when the simple truth appears to be so very unexpected."

At the breakfast table she was serenely placid, eating and drinking in a calm sort of way, and paying no attention to the scowl on the face of her husband opposite, although usually any such symptoms would have been soothed and smoothed away at once with sweet words and anxious care.

This morning she was honest; she didn't think she deserved soothing, and she wasn't going to give in. Mr. Brown went off to business out of humor with himself, his wife, and everything in general. After he had left, Mrs. Brown went down stairs to see the butcher. She said to the boy:

"This is a poor piece of beef; and you know it."

"Marm?" said the boy, his eyes staring.

"You take this back to Mr. Johnson and tell him that I think that it is cheating to send me such a poor piece of meat as this, when I pay him the very highest price for everything."

"Yes'm," said the boy, still staring.

"Well! Take it and go 'long."

"Yes'm," said the boy, still dazed, as he lifted the piece into his basket and turned to go. He was amazed. Never before had Mrs. Brown found fault; and they had palmed off on her in times past many a piece of beef not weighed in the scales of justice.

Bridget was standing open-mouthed near by.

Mrs. Brown gazed meditatively over the top of her head, and her glance, to Bridget's eye, seemed a trifle severe.

"Please, m'am, that is it?" she said, humbly.

"I was just thinking, to tell the truth, Bridget," said Mrs. Brown, with a laugh, "how nice and wavy your hair was, and wishing that I had it. You don't have to put it in crimp papers over night; do you?"

"Oh! no, m'am!" beamed Bridget. "I don't! Shure but it's the plague of me life it is; always tangle up that tight there's no comin' to it decently."

"Well! it's very pretty," answered Mrs. Brown, "and if it was mine, I'd be curling it all the time, I'd be so proud of it."

"Shure it's welcome 'ya'd be to it, if I could only give it to ye," laughed Bridget, as she turned aside to wash up the breakfast dishes.

Mrs. Brown now went upstairs, and

there just coming in at the front door, was her favorite sister-in-law.

Good morning, Lizzie! So glad to see you. Come right upstairs to my room."

Now Lizzie was a favorite of Mrs. Brown's; and she was glad to see her. They chatted for a moment or so upon different subjects, and then Lizzie said: "Oh! How do you like my new hat? Just got it yesterday. Don't you think it's becoming?"

Mrs. Brown took a look at it.

"No-o," she answered reluctantly, "I don't. I think it's too big for you, and too broad."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lizzie, her face coloring up.

"You see," went on Mrs. Brown, determined still to speak the truth, "Your face is broad, Lizzie, any way; and a hat shaped like that makes it look more so."

"Indeed!" flared Lizzie, picking up her gloves and parasol. "Much obliged, I'm sure; but I don't think your face is any narrower than mine is!"

"Why, Lizzie!" expostulated Mrs. Brown. "I surely haven't offended you? I merely spoke the truth when you asked me; and I didn't—I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"The truth, indeed!" snapped Lizzie. "Where would you be, if I told the truth, I wonder!"

And with this last shot Lizzie bounced out of the room and went down the front stairs as fast as possible.

"Lizzie! Lizzie!" called out Mrs. Brown plaintively over the banisters: "Lizzie! Please come back!"

But Lizzie was deaf, and went out shutting the door to with a bang.

Mrs. Brown went back into her bedroom, and—well yes—she cried a little. It certainly was hard, this being a champion of absolute truth. However, a little reflection soon brought back her enthusiasm, and she determined still to go on in the good new way. Just then, Mary, who had answered the ring of the front door bell, came up to say: "Mrs. Green is down-stairs, m'am; and would like to see you."

Mrs. Brown reflected a moment. Mrs. Green was a talkative, gossip-loving neighbor, whom she had ever detested, but whom she had ever been careful to conciliate out of deference to the sharpness of her tongue.

"You may tell her, Mary," said Mrs. Brown, slowly, "that I do not wish to see her."

"That you're very busy, and please to excuse me, m'am, is it?" said Mary, understandingly.

"No," said Mrs. Brown. "Say just this—that I do not wish to see her this morning."

Mary smiled and went down and delivered the message.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, in a high-pitched voice: "don't wish to see me! What's the reason, I'd like to know? Has any one been carrying tales of me to her, I wonder? This is an awful town for gossiping, and I know it; and perhaps some one has told her some story about me, or something. Just go up-stairs again, my good girl, and tell your mistress that, if she has heard any stories, I am positive I can explain them all away. It would grieve me to be bad friends with Mrs. Brown," she added, smoothly.

Mary went up-stairs again and delivered her message.

"Tell her, Mary," said Mrs. Brown decidedly, "that I have heard no stories what ever; but that I do not wish to see her this morning."

Down went Mary and delivered this message.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, this time, "I'll tell your mistress, my girl, that she won't be troubled by my calls in the future; but that she'll hear from me some time soon!"

And with her head in air and eyes flashing, Mrs. Green sailed slowly out.

Mary ran up stairs, giggling.

"O, Missus! She was that put out!"

"I suppose so, Mary," said Mrs. Brown gravely. "But I couldn't help it."

An hour later Mrs. Brown sat down to write a note. She had received an invitation to a luncheon party, given by a lady whom she knew but slightly, but who had invited her out of consideration for her established social position. It was for this reason and no other that she was included among the select and chosen few, and she knew it, and it annoyed and vexed her. She would not go; to that she had made up her mind some time before; but she had intended sending a polite note of regret. Now she determined to send an honest note of explanation. Her note read:

Mrs. Smith: Dear Madam—I have to acknowledge the receipt of your invitation for the 11th inst. As you have seen me but twice in your life, and do not know me at all intimately, I am surprised at your asking me to a luncheon party, as if I were an old and valued friend. To say that I thank you would be untrue, because your reason for asking me cannot be truly complimentary to me; and to say that I regret not to be able to present would be equally false. I am not coming, because I do not wish to come; and I trust it is soundest that you will understand that it was no feeling of discourtesy toward you that I pen the words. I am very sincerely,

Mrs. F. Brown.

Mrs. Brown looked at this a moment a little doubtfully before she put it into the envelope, then smiled to herself a little wickedly, gummed down the flap of the envelope, put on the stamp with more than her usual firmness.

After dinner, about four o'clock in the afternoon, the door-bell rang again; and this time it was the minister, Mr. Jackson, who had come to call.

"I'm real glad to see you, Mr. Jackson," she said, as she came into the parlor. "Sit down."

"Delightful day! Isn't it, Mrs. Brown?" said the minister.

"Well! It is pleasant," said Mrs. Brown.

"I called especially, dear Mrs. Brown, to talk over with you that plan of getting up a club among the church ladies for the benefit of the heathen. You remember you were among the number that agreed with me about its being a good and interesting way to raise money for the object."

Poor Mrs. Brown! Her heart and courage were down to zero! If there was one thing above another that she didn't believe in among church works it was this very one of sending money to the heathen. But here was her pastor, expecting her cordial help and sympathy, and there was her vow of sincerity and honesty! What should she do? For one black moment she almost failed; then, rallying all her forces, she said, faintly:

"Sir, I do not approve of getting up a club of this sort."

"What?" questioned Mr. Jackson.

"I said, sir," continued Mrs. Brown, gathering courage as she went on, "that I did not approve of a club of that sort. I must confess," she said, while her whole face flamed for an instant, "that I was only telling a polite lie when I said with you, the other day, that I thought it would be a good thing. I don't think it would be a good thing. I think we need

to use our money much nearer home. I think we have no right to be treating the heathen to Bibles, until we pay our debts—even if it is but a church debt; and after that is paid and we have any money to spare, the heathen in our own land near our own doors, I think, should be looked after before we go across the seas in search of new ones. I know such opinions are not Christian, perhaps, sir; but that is what I honestly think; and thinking so, you see, Mr. Jackson, I should be a regular hypocrite if I joined any such society as you propose to organize."

Mr. Jackson was a wise man, and a practical one. He said:

"What you say, my dear Mrs. Brown, surprises me greatly, but I forbear to urge you to become a member of anything wherein your conscience would be troubled. Still I trust that, although you feel you cannot give us the help and strength of your presence, you will aid us a little financially. You know we shall need all aid possible in that direction," he smiled kindly.

This time feminine logic was greater than the feminine heart, and the good man was astounded when Mrs. Brown exclaimed:

"Why, of course I won't! Not a cent, sir! How curious of you to ask me for such a thing! Would you really, sir—you a minister of the gospel, take it from me after what I have just said to you? would you?"

"Why yes," smiled Mr. Jackson, good-naturedly. "Of course I would. The cause is good, and you wouldn't miss the money, and"

"Mr. Jackson!" interrupted Mrs. Brown indignantly. "Allow me to say that I do not think very much of you!"

"Where is my hat, please, Mrs. Brown? I really am not very readily provoked; but such a remark as this, is really—really—not to be received! I have the honor, m'am," said the good man, trembling with rage, "to bid you a very good afternoon!"

And putting on his hat and grasping his cane, the poor man let himself out at the front door, while Mrs. Brown merely stood still and let him go. Once, for one moment, she was tempted to call him back and recant; but then, "No!" she thought, "I will be sincere, I will be honest." So Mr. Jackson left the house, hurt, wounded, humiliated, and not at all comprehending how it all came about.

Mrs. Brown heaved a sigh, and went up-stairs again.

"I seem to have had luck with my callers," she thought.

Just before supper time she went down into the kitchen to see if everything was progressing as it should do. To her surprise the kitchen was empty! No Bridget there! And, worse than that, the fire was out, and no sign at all of any preparations for supper! Where could she be? She looked in the cellar, she looked out in the back-yard—no Bridget. Puzzled and worried, she went up-stairs again.

"Mary," she said, "where's Bridget?"

"In her room m'am, gettin' dressed, I think," said Mary.

Mrs. Brown knocked at her bedroom door.

"Bridget! Bridget!"

"Is m'am," answered Bridget, opening the door. "What is it?"

"Oh-h! Bridget!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "And well might she exclaim; for there was Bridget with her hair in endless curls, and a pink ribbon tying them up, smiling and smirking in a way that, to Mrs. Brown, was maddening."

"Why, Bridget!"

"Yes, m'am," smiled Bridget. "Doant they look fine?"

"Bridget," said Mrs. Brown, severely, "pin those curls up and go right down and attend to your work. Don't you know it's near six o'clock and the fire's all out?"

"Dear me!" cried Bridget, lifting up her hands in dismay. "You doant mane to tell me that?"

"I do; just that; and you'd better be lively," said Mrs. Brown, angrily, turning to walk down stairs.

"Shure I won't be a minute," said Bridget, excitedly; and not waiting to tuck up her curls or anything else, she slipped on her apron and went down to the kitchen as fast as she could go.

A few minutes after six Mr. Brown returned from his home. He walked in the front gate slowly, and when inside of the house said "good evening" to his wife, in a most dignified manner. Going over to him timidly Mrs. Brown kissed him, as was her wont upon his return home. His face relaxed a little at this; but the anger of the morning was still upon him, and he did not return her kiss at all. With a sigh Mrs. Brown took a rocking-chair and sat down in it. Half-past six came and no supper-bell. Mrs. Brown slipped down-stairs quietly and tried to hurry Bridget up. She found her busy, red-faced and flurried, with her curls still in all their splendor, hanging round her neck. "In doin' me level best m'am," she exclaimed: "And shure it can't be long now, although it always does take some time for thim vegetables to cook, m'am!"

Mrs. Brown heaved a sigh and went up again. Silently she rocked to and fro in the little arm chair.

"Sarah," said her husband severely, "is supper never going to be ready? Here it's fifteen minutes past time, and I'm most starved!"

"Yes, dear," answered his wife meekly; "It won't be very long now."

"What's the matter," he growled, "that it's so behind-hand?"

"Bridget—Bridget stayed up-stairs too long," faltered Mrs. Brown.

"Humph!" said Mr. Brown, as he picked up his newspaper again.

At seven o'clock the supper-bell rang. Luckily all went serenely. The vegetables were cooked, and the meat was done to a turn, and all went well.

Mrs. Brown's tried nerves were beginning to rally a little, when suddenly her husband exclaimed in a tone of strong disgust:

"Well!"

"What is it, dear?" said Mrs. Brown, anxiously.

"See for yourself," said Mr. Brown, fishing up with his fork a long hair out of his dish of peas. "That's nice; isn't it?"

"I'm afraid—I guess—guess," stammered Mrs. Brown, bursting into tears, "that—that's a part of one of Bridget's curls—Oh! Oh!" she sobbed, "was there ever a woman so unhappy as I am! Oh! dear! Oh! dear! Oh! Oh!"

"Why! Why! Why!" said Mr. Brown, laying down his knife and fork in surprise. "What is the matter? What is the matter?"

Leaving her seat and going around to his end of the table Mrs. Brown put her arms about her husband's neck, and sobbed out all her woes. "Oh! dear! Please forgive me, and I'll never, I'll

never tell the truth again! It isn't right to be perfectly honest. It isn't, Oh! it isn't. And oh! oh! if you'll only forgive me this once, dear, I'll never, no never!"

"For heaven's sake!" gasped out her astonished husband. "Are you out of your mind, or what is the matter? Wrong to be honest! What do you mean?"

Then, with many sobs and tears, the penitent enthusiast told him of her vow, and of her day's doings, and how her injudicious praise of Bridget's curls had made his supper late, and about her callers, and all of her day's experience.

And that man? Well, yes; he laughed. He laughed until he cried! He laughed until his wife laughed through her tears with him; and they both laughed so long and loud that Bridget came stealing up-stairs to see what was the matter, and, peeping in through the doorway, Mr. Brown caught a glimpse of her curls; and that set them both off harder than ever, and "Oh! me!" gasped Mr. Brown, at last, "don't ever do that again, Sarah. Don't! Honest for a day! Dear me! How you would revolutionize the world! You always were quixotic my dear; but I didn't think you were quite so bad as this. Honest for a day! Oh! goodness!"

And Mr. Brown went off into another peal of laughter that only was stopped through sheer exhaustion.

And poor Mrs. Brown? Well, the only good she saw that she had gained by the effort was that Mrs. Green was offended with her beyond hope of reconciliation, and that her husband was put in jolly good humor for a week.—Isabel H. Reed, in Independent.

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